

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) (*Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.*) is one of California's most important environmental laws. It requires state and local agencies to disclose and consider the environmental implications of their actions. It further requires agencies to avoid environmental impacts when such avoidance is feasible. In furtherance of these goals, six objectives are identified:

- disclose to decision makers and the public the significant environmental effects of proposed activities;
- identify ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage;
- prevent environmental damage by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures;
- disclose to the public reasons for agency approvals of projects with significant environmental effects;
- foster interagency coordination; and
- enhance public participation.

The CEQA procedures are guided by the legislative intent to have public participation to the greatest extent possible. The legislature also intended that decision makers be able to make informed decisions based on substantial information regarding a "project" and that these decisions be based on a trail of reasoning accessible to the public.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and its preparation is the method by which information is gathered and organized, impacts assessed, and mitigation measures developed. The EIR is prepared by a lead agency, circulated for public review and comment, and a final document with responses to public comments is prepared for consideration by advisory and legislative bodies (planning commission or city council).

In addition to and guided by the legislative intent, the State Resources Agency has adopted regulations, known as the State CEQA Guidelines (*Guidelines §15000 et seq.*), to guide agencies in implementing the law. The Guidelines provide detailed procedures that agencies must follow to implement CEQA, including the procedures for the preparation of a CEQA document (an EIR for those projects that may have significant impacts requiring mitigation measures or a Negative Declaration for projects with no significant impacts).

CEQA is more than merely a "procedural" statute. Substantive provisions of CEQA include provisions requiring agencies to avoid or mitigate significant impacts disclosed in an EIR when feasible.

1.1 TYPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This document is the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the Bickford Ranch Project ("proposed project"), a mixed use development. The Draft EIR has been prepared for the Placer County Planning Department acting in the capacity of Lead Agency pursuant to CEQA, Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance and the State CEQA Guidelines. This is a project Draft EIR analyzing the specific impacts of the proposed project, as described in the Bickford Ranch Specific Plan and Tentative Map, dated August 17, 1999, the Vesting Large Lot Tentative Subdivision Maps, the Vesting Small Lot Tentative Subdivision Maps, the Minor Boundary Line adjustment, approval of the proposed Community Facilities District, approval of restricting vehicular access and abandonment of portions of Clark Tunnel Road and approval of a development agreement. The Bickford Ranch Specific Plan is

supported by a variety of technical documents prepared by the Applicant and its consultants. The Bickford Ranch Specific Plan and its supporting documents are incorporated herein by reference. Referenced documents prepared by the Applicant are available for review at the Placer County Planning Department.

This Draft EIR would also serve as a Program EIR for subsequent discretionary permits or actions that may be needed to develop portions of the project as identified in the Specific Plan and/or Tentative Maps, having met the criteria for Program EIRs pursuant to CEQA Section 15168, as being a series of actions or activities that can be characterized as one large project and are related either geographically; as logical part of a chain of activities; in connection with rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria governing a continuing program; or as individual activities carried out under common authority (statutory or regulatory) and having similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways. This program level document would be used to consider later use permit applications for commercial or residential projects, amendments, minor adjustments, revisions to Tentative Maps, variances, Community Facilities Districts, etc. These later activities would be examined in light of this Program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared, pursuant to Section 15168(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines. If it is determined that this Program EIR, including the alternatives analyzed and mitigation measures proposed, adequately identified the impacts of these actions and identified mitigation, then no additional environmental documentation would be required.

The proposed project would develop the 1,955-acre site to provide 1,950 dwelling units, an eight-acre village commercial site, and a variety of public and private recreational facilities, including an 18-hole golf course, driving range, two recreation centers, public parks, trails, and open space areas. The planned residential development comprises three distinct residential communities based on the property's topographic setting. These communities would have varying residential densities with lots ranging in size from 5,000 feet to 10 acres. One of these communities, Heritage Ridge, would be age-restricted and specifically designed to meet the preferences and needs of active senior adults. Approximately 40 percent of the site would be reserved for natural open space, park, and recreation facilities, including the 18-hole golf course. This Draft EIR examines direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the planning, construction, and operation of the Bickford Ranch Project utilizing the most currently-available information. All such later activities would also be examined in light of CEQA *Guidelines* Section 15182, which provides an exemption for residential projects undertaken pursuant to and in conformity with a specific plan that complies with all provisions of this section. The scope of later activities to which this exemption may apply includes land subdivisions, zoning changes and residential planned unit developments.

The geographic boundaries of the proposed project are referred to as the proposed project site throughout this document, except as otherwise noted. A detailed project description is provided in Chapter 3.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE DRAFT EIR

As required by CEQA, the Draft EIR must focus only on significant environmental effects (*Guidelines* §15143). Comments received from the public and agencies in response to a publicly circulated Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Initial Study may determine additional areas of examination. Based on the NOP and Initial Study (Appendix A), the environmental issues requiring analysis in this EIR are land use, population and housing, public services and utilities, transportation and circulation, air quality, noise, soils and geology, hazardous wastes and materials, hydrology and water quality, biology, cultural resources and visual quality.

The Draft EIR characterizes the existing environmental resources of the proposed project site, analyzes potential impacts to those resources (as a result of implementation of the proposed project), and identifies

both “proposed” and “recommended” mitigation measures to reduce impacts. “Proposed” mitigation measures are those proposed by the Applicant as part of the project; “recommended” mitigation measures are recommended by this Draft EIR and are in addition to those proposed by the Applicant. Other CEQA-related issues, such as cumulative and growth-inducing impacts resulting from the proposed project, are also analyzed. Seven alternatives to the proposed project are analyzed in this Draft EIR. These alternatives include the following: 1) No Project Alternative; 2) Reduced Density Alternative; 3) Conventional Housing Alternative; 4) Rural Residential Alternative; 5) Clark Tunnel Road Access Alternative (including three sub-alternatives); 6) Affordable Housing Alternative; and 7) Sierra College Boulevard Widening Alternative.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

In general, CEQA *Guidelines* define a significant effect on the environment as “a substantial, or potentially substantial” adverse change in the physical environment. A potential impact is considered significant if a project would substantially degrade the environmental quality of land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance (CEQA *Guidelines*, 1998). Definitions of significance vary with the physical condition affected and the setting in which the change occurs. The CEQA *Guidelines* set forth physical impacts which trigger the requirement to make “mandatory findings of significance” (CEQA *Guidelines*, 1998).

This CEQA document relies on three levels of impact significance: 1) Less than significant impact and no mitigation measures warranted; 2) Significant impact that can be mitigated to a level that is less than significant; and 3) Significant impact that cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant. This document also identifies project benefits.

Each resource area uses a distinct set of significance criteria. Where measurable and explicit quantification of significance is identified, such as violation of an ambient air quality standard, this measurement is used to assess the level of significance of a particular impact in this Draft EIR. Therefore, if air standards were exceeded by the proposed project, the impact would be considered significant. A mitigation measure such as development and implementation of a dust control plan could reduce the impact to less than significant. If criteria for determining significance relative to a specific environmental resource impact are not so identified in the *Guidelines*, criteria were developed for this Draft EIR.

For less easily quantifiable impacts, events or occurrences which would be regarded as significant or potentially significant are identified. For instance, impacts to park and recreation facilities would be identified as significant if, because insufficient park facilities were provided in the proposed project, demand on existing municipal facilities would exceed the capacity to adequately support the increased demand. A criterion for determining the level of significance for visual resources is the reduction in scenic quality due to a high contrast with existing conditions or elimination of landscape features deemed important to high visual quality.

The significance criteria are identified at the beginning of the impacts discussion for each resource area. These significance levels promote consistent evaluation of impacts for all alternatives considered, even though significance criteria are necessarily different for each resource considered.

1.4 CEQA PROCESS

An NOP and Initial Study for this Draft EIR was issued on August 10, 1998. The NOP and Initial Study and comment letters received on the NOP are included in Appendix A, along with the Specific Plan,

Development Standards, and Design Guidelines. The distribution list for this Draft EIR is contained in Appendix B. This Draft EIR is available for public review at the following locations:

- Placer County Planning Department, 11414 “B” Avenue, Auburn, CA
- Penryn Branch Library, 2215 Rippey Road, Penryn, CA
- Lincoln City Library, 590 5th Street, Lincoln, CA
- Loomis Branch Library, 6050 Library Drive, Loomis, CA

In addition, Volumes I and II (Draft Environmental Impact Report, Specific Plan Documentation, and EIR Technical Appendices) are available for public review at the following locations:

- Penryn Fire Station, 7206 Church Street, Penryn, CA
- Chamber of Commerce, 511 5th Street, Lincoln, CA
- City of Lincoln Community Development Department, 1390 1st Street, Lincoln, CA
- Lincoln Travel and Cruise, 590 McBean Park Drive, Lincoln, CA
- Consolidated Fire District – Station 2 (Ophir), 9305 Crater Hill, Ophir, CA

Comments received during the comment period and at the public hearing(s) will be addressed in the Final EIR. The Final EIR will be reviewed by the Placer County Board of Supervisors for certification in accordance with CEQA and County Guidelines. Written findings of fact for each significant environmental impact identified in the EIR will be prepared to:

- Determine the proposed project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact Alternative;
- Find that changes to the proposed project are within another agency’s jurisdiction, and such changes have been or should be adopted; and
- Find that specific economic, social, or other considerations make mitigation measures or proposed project alternatives infeasible.

Such findings must be based on substantial evidence in the administrative record and must include an explanation that bridges the gap between evidence in the record and the conclusions required by CEQA.

Based on these findings, a Statement of Overriding Considerations (Statement) will be prepared as part of the project approval process. If the decision-making body elects to proceed with a project identified with significant impacts, then a Statement explaining the decision to balance the benefits of the project against unavoidable environmental impacts is necessary.